EAST COAST FISHERIES 40 SW NORTH RIVER DRIVE

Designation Report





REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI PRESERVATION OFFICER TO THE HISTORIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION BOARD ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF THE EAST COAST FISHERIES AS A HISTORIC SITE

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| Passed and Adopted on | |
| Resolution No | |

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

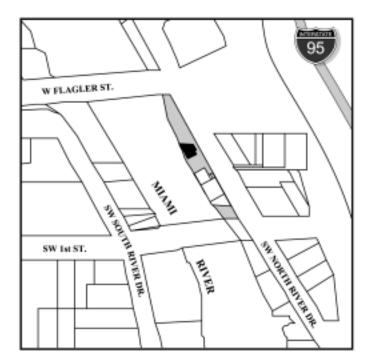
| Historic Name: |
|--|
| Miller's Fish Market - 1926–1932 East Coast Fisheries - 1933–present |
| <u>Current Name</u> : |
| East Coast Fisheries |
| <u>Location</u> : |
| 40 SW North River Drive Miami, Florida |
| Present Owner: |
| David Swartz 150 SE 2 nd Avenue, #500 Miami, Florida 33131-1570 |
| <u>Present Use</u> : |
| Vacant |
| Zoning District: |
| C-1 |
| <u>Tax Folio Number</u> : |
| 01-4137-036-0080 |
| Boundary Description: |
| All of Lyon's Dock of the plat of MIAMI NORTH RE-SUB OF BLOCK 138, as recorded in Plat Book 4 at Page 68, of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida. |
| <u>Classification</u> : |
| Historic Site |

EAST COAST FISHERIES

40 SW NORTH RIVER DRIVE









II. SIGNIFICANCE

Specific Dates:

Original building - 1926 Wholesale and Commissary Building - 1927

Architect:

Unknown

Builder/Contractor:

Unknown

Statement of Significance:

East Coast Fisheries is both historically and architecturally significant. This building reflects historic developmental trends of commercial fishing-related activity on the Miami River since the 1920s. It also represents an enduring visual landmark for the fishing industry along the Miami River, as the site of the East Coast Fisheries business since the 1930s. This surrounding area of the Miami River, once characterized by a prosperous fish industry, has little remaining from these commercial enterprises. Architecturally, the East Coast Fisheries building is a noteworthy example of the Mediterranean Revival architectural style, which defined Miami's built environment during the Land Boom period. Additionally, most of the structures historically associated with the fishing industry were vernacular and functional buildings, constructed with little stylistic detailing. This building remains as one of the most visually striking resources related to the fishing industry along the Miami River in the downtown area.

Soon after the City's incorporation, fisheries were a major industry in Miami. With the advent of the railroad and the perfection of the quick freezing process, fishing became an important commercial enterprise. In Miami, the arrival of the Florida East Coast Railway in 1896 and the deepening of the harbor in 1905 resulted in the industry's capacity to ship fish, primarily mackerel, out of Miami. In 1909 alone, two million pounds of fish were caught and shipped from Miami.

By the height of the Land Boom in 1925, the burgeoning population of South Florida resulted in an extensive increase in commercial activity. The fishing industry estimated about 34 million pounds of fish were caught in 1900 and 125 million pounds in 1938. By-products of commercial fisheries also became an important commodity. Fertilizers, fish-oils, and oyster shells for road building enhanced the profit margin for all major fish houses.

The area along the Miami River near the railroad and harbor became crowded with fish houses. In 1909, three fish houses—Wenona Fish Company, Biscayne Fish Company, and Dale Miller's Fish Company—were situated near 2nd Street and Biscayne Bay along present-day Biscayne Boulevard. However, 11 fish companies were situated on the banks of the Miami River. The wholesale fish industry employed more than 500 men and 200 boats during this period.

Since approximately 1911, the area just south of the Flagler Bridge, which includes the present-day East Coast Fisheries building, has been occupied by the fishing industry. During the early part of the twentieth century, E. H. Lyon constructed the Lyon Wharf in the area. The area was characterized by marine-related activity, such as boat building and repair and fish houses.

According to the 1918 Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, a rectangular one-story "Fish" building stood at the southwest corner of North River Drive (now SW North River Drive) and 12th Street (now Flagler Street). On the site of this fish house, Walter R. Miller, a fisherman, constructed an iron clad, one-story building with a trapezoidal plan in 1921. As early as 1914, Miller had a fish company, named the Union Fish Company and later the Miller Fish Company, along Biscayne Bay, where some of the other major fish businesses were situated. When Miller relocated his business to the shores of the Miami River, the company name was identified in the city directories as the Riverside Fish Market.

It appears that the one-story metal building was torn down in 1926 and the Mediterranean Revival-style building that is currently located on the site was constructed. In the August 8, 1926 edition of the *Miami Herald*, an announcement and advertisement stated that the Miller's Fish Market building was open. The new structure cost \$150,000 and the advertisement claimed it was the "South's Most Beautiful Fish Market." Mr. Miller held a reception for his friends and the public to inspect the new building and business. The company remained in this location until 1932, when it moved to 427 West Flagler Street.

In 1933, East Coast Fisheries, Inc. moved into the former Miller's Fish Market building. Max Swartz, the founder of the company, arrived with his family from Russia and settled in Massachusetts around the turn-of-the-century. Swartz began working at Booth Fisheries when he was 18 years old, and shortly thereafter moved to Miami where more lucrative business opportunities were available. Swartz began traveling between Miami and the Northeast transporting and selling fish. Swartz expanded his sales to other major cities in the United States and eventually began selling seafood internationally. Products included snapper, grouper, lobster, oysters and stone crabs. His wholesale business soon expanded into a local fish market in 1933, when the company moved into the former Miller and Sons Fish building. The company became known for its catchy slogan "If It Swims, We Have It."

The company continued to grow with the purchase the building located to the south of the main building in 1937. This building was constructed around 1927 and housed several businesses. When East Coast Fisheries, Inc. purchased the building

it was used as the company's warehouse. Over time, the building was enlarged with several additions to the southwest and northwest ends that accommodated cold storage areas and an icehouse. In the late 1930s and 1940s, the Bridge Hotel occupied the upper floors of the business' main building.

Max Swartz died in 1978, but his family continued to own and manage the business following his death. Max's son, David Swartz, operated the business and also started a restaurant in the 1970s. When David died in 1995, his brother Peter took over the company. During the Spring of 2000, the business closed and the building currently remains vacant.

East Coast Fisheries is an architecturally significant example of the Mediterranean Revival style and continues to embody distinguishing characteristics of the style. The features of the style exhibited by the building include the use of the arch motif in the window treatments; stuccoed wall surfaces; decorative detailing such as quoins, voussoirs, and cartouches; and the roof with its shaped parapets, bell-shaped feature, and pent roof sections with wood rafter ends. Although the building has experienced several non-historic modifications, it continues to maintain integrity of design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

East Coast Fisheries has significance in the historical and architectural heritage of the City of Miami; possesses integrity of design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association; and is eligible for designation under the following criteria:

3. Exemplifies the historical, cultural, political, economic, or social trends of the community.

East Coast Fisheries reflects the historical development trends of commercial fishing-related activity on the Miami River since the 1920s. It has also been an important and enduring site for the fishing industry along the Miami River, as the location of the East Coast Fisheries business from 1933 through the year 2000.

5. Embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or method of construction.

East Coast Fisheries is significant as an example of the Mediterranean Revival style as applied to commercial structures in Miami during the Land Boom period. It continues to exhibit several distinguishing characteristics of the style, including arched window openings, stuccoed exterior walls, quoins, voussoirs, cartouches, and shaped parapets.

III. DESCRIPTION

Present and Original Appearance:

Setting:

The East Coast Fisheries building is located at the southwest corner of SW North River Drive and W Flagler Street. This historic building is situated on the north end of a parcel known as Lyon's Dock. The property includes an open paved area and the Commissary and Wholesale Department building at the southern end that has been deemed non-contributing due to a loss of historic physical integrity.

The building is sited on the Miami River, and is immediately surrounded by paved areas. There are no significant landscape features on the site, although several palms and Australian pine trees are located on the property. The building's primary elevations face SW North River Drive. The surrounding environment includes a combination of vacant lots, parking lots, and commercial buildings. Bridges to the north and south flank the parcel.

Exterior Description:

Constructed in 1926, the East Coast Fisheries is built in the Mediterranean Revival style. The basic exterior plan is trapezoidal due to the irregular lot configuration. The building rests on a continuous concrete foundation, and has a hollow clay tile structural system. The exterior walls are covered with a smooth stucco finish.

The building actually has four stories, one of which is the basement and is only visible from the river. Looking southwest towards the main elevations, only three stories are evident. The ground floors feature more elaborate decorative elements, while the upper floors are simpler in appearance. The east elevation's first floor exhibits three arched windows; the middle window is the tallest and most steeply arched of the three. The flanking windows are set in slightly projecting surrounds. They are decorated with quoins and voussoirs highlighted by cartouches. At this time, the window openings are blocked in. The north elevation features three steeply arched windows flanked by articulated stonework and a rectangular entrance also decorated with quoins and voussoirs. The arched windows on the ground floor are partially enclosed with concrete, plywood, and air-conditioning units. The upper portions of the arches feature multi-light windows with opaque glass.

The upper stories have simple regularly spaced rectangular windows. The original windows have been replaced with metal awning windows or the window openings are enclosed with plywood. Simple sills are located underneath these upper windows.

The main roof is flat and comprised of built-up materials. The roof is accented by a shaped parapet that wraps around the northeast corner, behind which is a priapic decorative element. This feature is not evident in the 1926 photograph of the building, but it does appear in a 1968 photograph of the building; consequently, the date on which this element was added is unknown. The other two corners have shaped parapets. Between the parapets, pent roofs supported by decorative rafter tails extend from the rooftop.

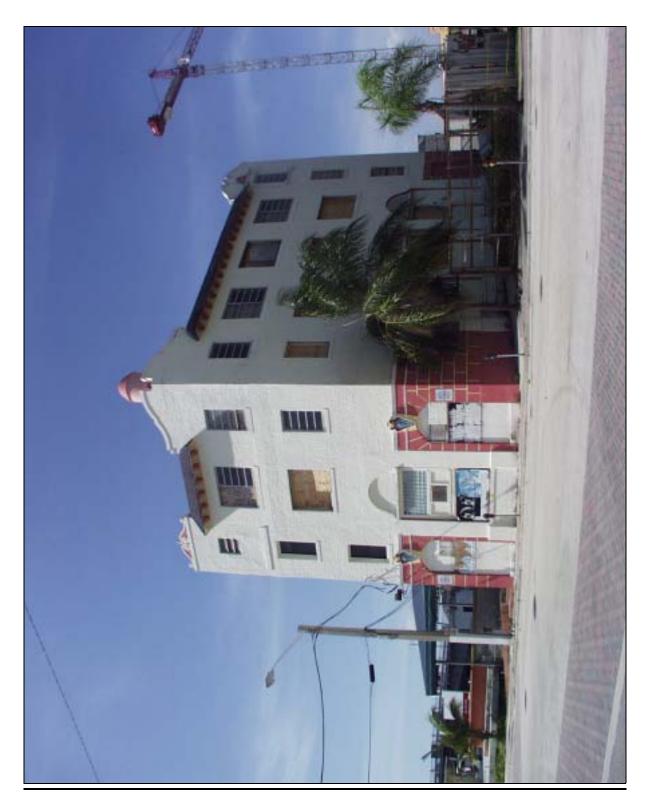
A fabric and metal-framed awning is attached to the south elevation. This elevation features one small window opening.

The west elevation, which faces the river, is four stories in height as the basement floor is evident on this façade. Decorative lines are scored in the stucco at the basement level. This elevation also features simple, regularly spaced rectangular windows. Like the other elevations, the original windows have been replaced with metal awning windows. Simple sills are located underneath these windows. The west elevation's roof displays a shaped parapet, and pent roofs supported by decorative rafter tails extend from the rooftop.

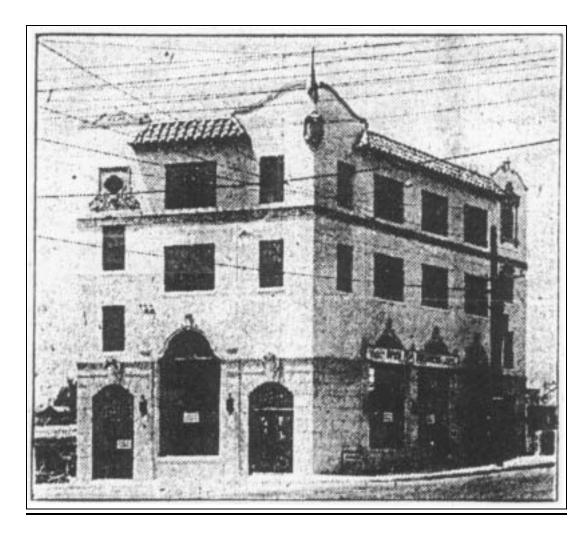
The building continues to maintain its overall historic physical integrity, although some historic elements have been removed since its construction. The loss of the original windows and the barrel tile on the pent roof portions are common alterations to historic buildings due to maintenance issues. Additionally, some decorative elements visible in the 1926 photograph are no longer present, such as the finial and cartouche at the corner of the parapet, and cornices under the third story windows and above the first floor windows. None of these changes severely impact the overall integrity of location, design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association, and the building's massing, original roof form, finishes, fenestration pattern, and most of the decorative elements are generally intact.

Contributing Structures and/or Landscape Features:

The only contributing structure within the site is the main East Coast Fisheries building. The Commissary and Wholesale Department building was not part of the original parcel and has been considerably altered since the period of significance; therefore, it is not considered to be a contributing structure. The paved lot between the East Coast Fisheries building and the Commissary and Wholesale Department building also does not contribute to the property. There are no contributing landscape features on the site.



East Coast Fisheries 40 SW North River Drive East and north façades 2002



East Coast Fisheries 40 SW North River Drive East and north façades 1926

IV. PLANNING CONTEXT

Present Trends and Conditions:

East Coast Fisheries is located along the Miami River in downtown Miami in an area where the majority of the historic buildings, including historic fishing- and marine-related businesses, are no longer extant. The East Coast Fisheries restaurant was closed in May 2000 due to numerous City code violations. The building now stands vacant and requires significant repair, primarily due to the general lack of proper maintenance over time. Due to its desirable location along the Miami River and the proposed developments planned in the area, the East Coast Fisheries building is considered an endangered resource. It is recommended that the rehabilitation of the historic East Coast Fisheries building is part of any future redevelopment plans of this property.

Preservation Incentives:

Based on the rarity of existing historic fishing and marine-related buildings along the Miami River, particularly in the downtown area, the preservation of these types of resources should be a priority. The City is prepared to work with the property owners and agencies, such as the Miami River Commission, in identifying solutions to retain these threatened properties.

Available financial incentives for substantial rehabilitation projects conducted according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards are the property tax abatement program currently available in Miami-Dade County and the federal income tax credit program for income-producing properties. It is hoped the City will adopt a tax abatement program in the future.

V. <u>Bibliography</u>

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